Regional - Climate Overview for December 2014–February 2015

Temperature and Precipitation Anomalies

Average temperatures for the three-month period were below normal except for much of Minnesota and northwestern Iowa. However, the temperature pattern was dominated by an extremely cold February, with temperature departures ranging from 3°F to 6°F below normal in the western portions of the region to 9°F to 12°F below normal over much of the central and eastern Midwest. December, in contrast, was above normal across the entire region. January temperatures were above normal from northwestern Iowa through Minnesota, near normal in the central Midwest, and below normal in the east.

While snowfall was above normal across the central and southern Midwest, precipitation for the three-month period was below normal across the entire region. Precipitation was only 25% to 50% of normal across portions of Minnesota and Wisconsin. All of Minnesota, much of Wisconsin, extreme northern Iowa, and southwestern Missouri are depicted in D0 (Abnormally Dry) on the U.S. Drought Monitor, and small portions of northwestern Minnesota are in D1 (Moderate Drought). Dry conditions that had developed across Kentucky were eliminated by the heavy rain and snow at the end of February.

Snowfall

Most of this winter’s snow fell during the month of February. The northern halves of Illinois and Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, northeast Missouri, east-central Iowa, and areas of far southern Illinois and southeast Missouri along and near the Ohio River experienced accumulated snowfall amounts up to 10 inches above normal while all other areas were below normal by up to 20 inches. Lake-effect regions in northern Michigan, the Upper Peninsula, and far northern Wisconsin were up to 40 inches below normal. Snowfall was less than 50% to 75% of normal across most of Minnesota and Wisconsin.
Transportation and Infrastructure

On January 9, 2015, lake-effect snow in southern Michigan caused a 190 vehicle pileup in Kalamazoo and Calhoun Counties. There was one fatality, numerous injuries, fires and spilled cargo, evacuations of homes, and closure of Interstate 94 in both directions for much of the day.

The snowstorm that produced blizzard conditions across the central Midwest on January 31–February 2 resulted in 1,300 flight cancellations and numerous delays across the region.

Six to 12 inches of snow followed by more than 2 inches of rain in Kentucky the last week of February resulted in numerous roof collapses and other damage.

Recreation

Early season warm weather and an overall lack of snow significantly impacted the snowmobile season across Minnesota and much of Wisconsin. The lack of snowmobile traffic negatively impacted bars, restaurants, gas stations, and resorts. On the plus side, the lack of snow days reduced municipal snow removal costs, eased travel, and benefitted outdoor construction activities.

Regional Outlook - for Spring 2015

Dry Winter a Two-Sided Coin

The below-normal precipitation during the winter months is generally good news for spring flooding potential. The risk of moderate flooding is low across most of the region except in a band from southern Missouri through the Ohio Valley. Moderate flooding was occurring at the beginning of March along the Wabash River in southern Illinois and Indiana and along the lower Ohio River. This flooding is due to the heavy rain and melting of heavy snow that occurred at the end of February and early March. Saturated soils and high streamflows are favorable for flooding to persist in Kentucky, southern Illinois, and southwest Indiana with the typical heavy spring rains seen in this area.

The seasonal U.S. Drought Outlook expects existing drought conditions to persist and further develop across Minnesota and far southern Wisconsin. No drought development is expected in the remainder of the Midwest though the spring.

A weak El Niño developed in the Pacific during February and there is a 50% to 60% chance that El Niño conditions will continue through the summer. Little impact is expected on Midwestern weather.